

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



**How to Succeed With Volunteers-In-Parks**  
60-Minute Module Series

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# **SUPERVISION**

## **Training Guide**

**National Park Service**  
**Volunteers-In-Parks Program**



# HOW TO SUCCEED WITH VOLUNTEERS-IN-PARKS

## 60-Minute Module Series

Program Preparation  
Program Planning  
Motivation  
Needs Assessment  
Designing Jobs  
Recruitment  
Interviewing  
Orientation  
Training  
Safety Management  
Supervision  
Delegation  
Performance Reviews  
Recognition

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# INTRODUCTION

The goal of supervising volunteers is to establish conditions that provide the encouragement and support needed to get the job done. In the traditional supervisor/worker model, the supervisor alone made decisions and directed the work of those reporting to him/her. Today's effective supervisor encourages staff and volunteers to be increasingly involved in decisions that affect them and to take more responsibility for their actions.

When a staff member or volunteer is asked to supervise one or more volunteers in the organization, there is a need to clarify (1) the role of the supervisor (2) the skills, qualities, and tasks involved in supervision (3) how supervising volunteers is both similar to, and distinct from, supervising paid staff and (4) suggested procedures to carry out this function. Even experienced supervisors find the transition to supervising of volunteers challenging, if the task and expectations are not clear. **If the staff or volunteers have no experience with supervision, training is clearly needed.**

The role of the supervisor encompasses many skills and techniques such as delegation, evaluation, training, etc., which are covered in other modules.

# PURPOSE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The **Purposes** of this module are to identify the basic skills and characteristics of good volunteer supervision, to clarify the supervisor's role, and to explore methods and systems for carrying out this role.

## Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

1. Define the role of supervisor.
2. Explain the similarities and differences in supervising paid versus non-paid staff.
3. Identify the skills and personal qualities of effective supervisors.
4. Discuss the various methods of supervising volunteers.

# GENERAL NOTES TO TRAINER

1. This workshop is in a suggested format. Feel free, however, to personalize it with your own stories. Also, phrase questions and activities in a manner most attuned to your organization.
2. Supervision of volunteers should have the same basic philosophy as paid staff supervision. Your focus in this workshop is to reinforce the NPS philosophy and style of supervision, while surfacing issues that can make supervision of volunteers especially challenging and rewarding.
3. Because this topic is multifaceted, it is very important to stress that this is not a “how-to” workshop, nor is its intent to problem solve around difficult supervision problems. As needs and issues surface that cannot be dealt with during this session, it is important to keep a list of them in clear view of participants and determine how they will be dealt with in future training.
4. Good supervision takes creativity, skill, and time. In the long run, however, good supervision also saves time and enhances the volunteer’s performance. When park management staff understands this, they are more likely to be supportive of the need to invest in establishing good supervision practices. Including them in training may be a good start toward building buy-in and support from staff.
5. The facilitator can choose to present much of the information or have participants share their experiences or observations in a brain storming fashion. The choice will depend on (1) the time frame for delivering the information (brainstorming takes longer, but gets more buy-in and involvement) (2) whether you, as trainer want an opportunity to share your expertise and (3) the maturity and experience level of participants.

# WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Transparency Handout	Section	Method of Presentation	Time
T-1 T-2 T-3	H-1 <b>Introduction</b> Activity/Icebreaker Introduction Learning Objectives Key Concepts	Activity Lecture	5 minutes
T-3 T-4 T-5 T-6 T-7 T-8 T-9	H-1 H-2 <b>Concept 1</b> Supervisors of VIPs must understand what's expected of them	Interactive Presentation	8 minutes
T-3 T-10 T-11	H-1 H-3 H-4 <b>Concept 2</b> All good supervisors share key skills/characteristics	Pair Activity Interactive Presentation	15 minutes
T-3 T-12 T-13	H-1 H-5 <b>Concept 3</b> Volunteer supervision is unique	Role Playing Brainstorming	17 minutes
T-3 T-14	H-1 <b>Concept 4</b> Supervision systems vary	Brainstorming Summary Remarks	10 minutes
T-3	H-1 <b>Summary/Wrap-Up/Evaluation</b>	Brainstorm Summary Remarks	5 minutes

**TOTAL TIME: 60 minutes**

# TRAINER'S NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

Time: 5 minutes

### T1: Experiences with Supervising Volunteers

Start session with a quick icebreaker.

If participants have had some experience with supervision, ask them to write down one word beginning with the letter S that best describes their previous experience with supervising volunteers.

Show T-1 with some suggestions but encourage them to use their own creativity to think of others:

Successful  
Stressful  
So-so  
Super  
Smooth  
Satisfying  
Strenuous  
Stormy

Have several participants share their word.

#### Debrief:

Summarize the essence of what you hear.

Generally you will have a mixture of responses. This is a result of one or several factors:

- (1) Sense of clarity of what was expected of them when supervising
- (2) Competence in the skill of supervision
- (3) Amount of time available to follow good principles of supervision
- (4) Experience with supervising difficult volunteers



**T-2: Learning Objectives**

**T-3: Key Concepts**

**H-1: Key Concepts**

This activity leads naturally into a statement as to the purpose of the module. Indicate that this is not an in-depth “how-to” session, but rather a general view of the supervisor’s role and the skills needed to be effective at supervising volunteers.

**Share Learning Objectives.**

Indicate that this workshop is built on **four Key Concepts**. Share T -3 briefly, indicating that each concept will be dealt with in this module.

## CONCEPT 1

Time: 8 minutes

Those who supervise volunteers must clearly understand the park's expectations of them as supervisors.

### T-3: Key Concepts

### H-1: Key Concepts

### T-4: Supervisory Skills

### T-5: Supervising Volunteers: Roles and Responsibilities

### H-2: Supervising Volunteers: Roles and Responsibilities

### T-6: Preparation/Orientation of Volunteer to Job

#### Presentation:

Supervision is an all-encompassing activity which involves the process of stimulating and overseeing the work of others.

It is important to remember that excellent supervisory skills are not measured by your personal accomplishments, **but, by the success of those who report to you.** Enhancing skills and techniques that support others in achieving their goals should be your aim. (If supervision is a new concept, you will need to expand participants' understanding of the basic principles of supervision.)

It is imperative that paid staff and lead volunteers feel a sense of clarity as to their roles and responsibilities with regard to supervising volunteers entrusted to them.

#### Activity:

Supervising tasks can be identified under four major categories. Tailoring this list to your organization, discuss one or two activities that are expected of those who supervise volunteers. Ask participants to suggest other tasks.

#### Suggested Categories:

##### I. Preparation/Orientation of Volunteer to job:

- write the job description
- share the job description with volunteer
- introduce volunteers to staff with whom they interface
- prepare the work area prepared
- explain the supervision and evaluation systems
- explain risk management issues
- share relevant policies and procedures

**T-7: Ongoing Support and Resources**

**T-8: Reporting Requirements**

**T-9: Evaluation**

**2. Ongoing support and resources:**

- training
- coaching (on-the-job)
- ongoing informal appreciation of volunteer
- materials, information, training to support volunteers efforts

**3. Reporting Requirements**

- individual and overall volunteer hours
- outcome of volunteer work
- reports to Supervisor/VIP Manager.

**4. Evaluation**

- annual (or as specified) performance review of volunteers
- annual written evaluation of volunteers' work within the park, division, etc.

Have participants take notes on **H-2** to clarify expectations of them as supervisors of volunteers.

## CONCEPT 2

Time: 15 minutes

People who are competent supervisors of salaried or non-salaried staff share key skills and personal characteristics.

### T-3: Key Concepts

### H-1: Key Concepts

### T-10: Skills of a Good Supervisor

### H-3: Skills of a Good Supervisor

#### Presentation:

You must be a superb supervisor when working with volunteers, because they can more readily leave the organization if they are discontented with the job, the supervision, etc.

Ask participants to brainstorm answers to (1) the key skills and (2) the key qualities of good supervisors. Record on a flip chart. (To assist them in the process, ask them to reflect on the skills and qualities of someone who has been a particularly good supervisor to them.)

**Brainstorm** the necessary skills and personal qualities of good supervision:

Skills should include:

- Delegation
- Planning (goals and direction)
- Coaching
- Listening
- Evaluating/Reviewing
- Climate setting
- Conflict resolution
- Recognition
- Training/teaching
- Team building
- Communicating clearly
- Problem solving
- Sharing knowledge
- Setting standards

**T-11: Personal Qualities of a Good Supervisor**

**H-4: Personal Qualities of a Good Supervisor**

Personal Qualities of a Good Supervisor should include:

- Trustworthy
- Consistent
- Good role model
- Positive attitude, sense of humor
- Empowering
- Supportive
- Others

**Participant response/activity**

Tell participants to add any new skills and qualities that surface in brainstorming. Have each individual evaluate themselves relative to these skills and qualities and indicate any they wish to improve. Have them briefly (in pairs) share one area they would like to work toward improving .

## CONCEPT 3

Time: 17 minutes

Although principles of supervision for volunteers and staff are very similar, there are some unique aspects of volunteer supervision.

### T-3: Key Concepts

### H-1: Key Concepts

### Role Playing Activity

### T-12: Supervision Activity

### T-13: Unique Aspects of Volunteer Supervision

### H-5: Unique Aspects of Volunteer Supervision

#### Activity:

Conduct the “Edgar” skit. Choose four class participants to play the following roles: Edgar, VIP 1, VIP 2, and Volunteer Coordinator. Complete the skit using the skit description and role summaries.

#### Debrief:

With the group, identify any differences they noticed between supervision of paid staff and volunteers. You may wish to record the responses on a flip chart or on a transparency. These and other ideas will most likely surface in the response:

- (1) Supervising volunteers is harder because they are frequently available only on a very part-time basis.
- (2) Supervisors may need to be more flexible in working with volunteers since other activities may take priority in their lives.
- (3) If volunteers don't like their supervisor, they can more readily leave. Salaried staff generally need to stick it out.
- (4) It is particularly important to explain the supervision and evaluation system to volunteers before they start to work, as they might not have had this experience with volunteering in the past. Salaried staff are more accustomed to supervision and evaluations.
- (5) It should be clear to whom the volunteer reports, particularly if there is a Volunteer Coordinator and a VIP supervisor as well.
- (6) Volunteer supervision may take more time due to socialization needs that many volunteers wish to meet in their volunteer experience.
- (7) It is frequently more difficult to confront volunteers in problematic situations because they are “giving” their time.

## CONCEPT 4

Time: 10 minutes

Supervision systems and methods can vary considerably depending on the level of formality, size, and style of the organization, type of job, etc.

**T-3: Key Concepts**

**H-1: Key Concepts**

**T-14: Supervision Methods**

### **Presentation:**

The key point is that an appropriate system of supervision be established, shared with the volunteer, and then adhered to.

Share examples of various methods of providing supervision:

### **Examples of Supervision Methods:**

- (1) Specific appointments at designated times
- (2) Open time when volunteers can schedule appointments
- (3) Monthly group or individual meetings
- (4) Supervision by “walking around” (informal, as needed)
- (5) Others . . .

## SUMMARY/WRAP-UP/EVALUATION

Time: 5 minutes

**T-3: Key Concepts**

**H-1: Key Concepts**

### Summarize Key Concepts

Supervision is a complex activity which involves a number of skills and qualities to effectively empower others to accomplish tasks, especially when working with volunteers.

**END 60-MINUTE TRAINING**



# SUGGESTIONS FOR EXPANDED ACTIVITIES

1. This workshop could be the first segment of a half- or full-day seminar on supervision. Other topics that might be included are interviewing, motivation, delegation, orientation, training, managing problem volunteers, performance reviews, recognition, etc.
2. For participants who do not have experience in supervision and coaching, there should be some introductory training on the basics of supervision. If a number of staff and volunteers need this training, it may be more cost effective to bring in a trainer who specializes in supervision. Anyone in the park who supervises volunteers could benefit.
3. Develop a written handout which would include your park's expectations of those entrusted with the supervision of volunteers. Distribute during the discussion of Concept 2.
4. Concept 3, covering the unique aspects of supervising volunteers, could be the focus of a 45-minute discussion. It would be particularly useful to discuss problems your park is having due to these differences and would afford you an opportunity to look at options for new approaches to dealing with these realities. (for example, if you realize that volunteers will need some flexibility in a regular assignment, you might develop a list of trained substitutes that they can call when they are unable to fulfill their commitment.)
5. As the participants and trainer uncover the varied skills and characteristics of effective supervisors, it would be a good time to discuss in which of these areas (coaching, listening, etc.) they would like more in-depth training or resources to enhance their skills.
6. To expand the discussion of supervision methods (Concept 4), discuss the pros and cons of the various methods and appropriate situations for the use of each method.
7. Topics such as situational leadership and leadership styles (using instruments such as Performax) could help participants see the need for possessing a variety of techniques to effectively supervise a diverse group of volunteers.

# RESOURCES

1. Lee, Jarlene Frances, with Julia M. Catagnus. *What We Have Learned (the Hard Way) About Supervising Volunteers: An Action Guide for Making Your Job Easier*, Energize, 1998. Available from [www.energizeinc.com](http://www.energizeinc.com)
2. McCurley, Steve and Sue Vineyard. *Handling Problem Volunteers: Real Solutions*, Heritage Arts Publishing, 1998. Available from [www.energizeinc.com](http://www.energizeinc.com) or [www.pointsoflight.org/catalog](http://www.pointsoflight.org/catalog)
3. McCurley, Steve and Rick Lynch. *Volunteer Management: Mobilizing All the Resources in the Community*, Chapter 8, “Supervising for maximum Performance,” Chapter 9, “Supervising the Invisible Volunteer,” and Chapter 10, “Special Supervisory Situations” Heritage Arts Publishing, 1996. Available from [www.energizeinc.com](http://www.energizeinc.com) or [www.pointsoflight.org/catalog](http://www.pointsoflight.org/catalog)
4. Information on supervising those who are doing “virtual” volunteering work: [www.serviceleader.org/new/virtual/](http://www.serviceleader.org/new/virtual/)

Other resources that may be available

5. Chapman, Elwood. *The Fifty Minute Supervisor*. Order from Crisp Publications, Inc., 95 First Street, Los Altos, California 94022. 1986.
6. Noyes, Katherine Cambell and Susan J. Ellis. *The (Help) I-Don't-Have-Enough-Time Guide to Volunteer Management*, 1995. Available from [www.energizeinc.com](http://www.energizeinc.com)

# TRANSPARENCIES

# Guide to Transparencies

- T-1:** Experiences with Supervising Volunteers
- T-2:** Learning Objectives
- T-3:** Key Concepts
- T-4:** Supervisory Skills
- T-5:** Supervising Volunteers: Roles and Responsibilities
- T-6:** Preparation/Orientation of Volunteer to Job
- T-7:** Ongoing Support and Resources
- T-8:** Reporting Requirements
- T-9:** Evaluation
- T-10:** Skills of a Good Supervisor
- T-11:** Personal Qualities of a Good Supervisor
- T-12:** Supervision Activity
- T-13:** Unique Aspects of Supervising Volunteers
- T-14:** Supervision Methods

# Experiences with Supervising Volunteers

Successful

Stressful

So-so

Super

Smooth

Satisfying

Strenuous

Stormy

Others...

# Learning Objectives

- Define the role of supervisor
- Explain the similarities and differences in supervising paid versus non-paid staff
- Identify the skills and personal qualities of effective supervisors
- Discuss the various methods of supervising volunteers

# Key Concepts

## Concept 1

Supervisors of volunteers must clearly understand the park's expectations of them as supervisors.

## Concept 2

People who are competent supervisors of paid staff or volunteers share key skills and personal characteristics.

## Concept 3

Although principles of supervision for volunteers and paid staff are very similar, there are some unique aspects of supervising volunteers.

## Concept 4

Supervision systems and methods can vary depending on the formality, size, and style of the park, type of job, etc.

# Supervisory Skills

Excellent supervisory skills  
are not measured by  
your personal accomplishments  
but by the successes of those  
who report to you.



# Supervising Volunteers: Roles and Responsibilities

- Preparation/Orientation of volunteer to job
- Ongoing support and resources
- Reporting requirements
- Evaluation

# Preparation/Orientation of Volunteer to Job

- Written job description
- Introduction to staff and volunteers
- Work area preparations
- Supervision and evaluation system explained
- Safety management issues explained
- Relevant policies and procedures shared
- Other...

# Ongoing Support and Resources

- Training
- Coaching
- Showing Appreciation
- Providing Materials and Information/Training

# Reporting Requirements

- Individual and overall volunteer hours
- Outcomes of volunteer work
- Reports to Supervisor/  
VIP Program Manager
- Periodic written volunteer reviews
- Other

# Evaluation

- Periodic performance review of a volunteer in your program
- Annual written evaluation of volunteers' work within the park, division, etc.
- Other

# Skills of a Good Supervisor

- Training/educating
- Team building
- Delegating
- Planning
- Coaching
- Listening
- Conflict resolution

# Skills of a Good Supervisor (Con't)

- Communications
- Problem Solving
- Evaluating/reviewing
- Climate setting
- Sharing knowledge
- Setting standards
- Other

# Personal Qualities of a Good Supervisor

- Trustworthy
- Consistent
- Models good behavior
- Positive attitude
- Empowering
- Supportive
- Other



# Supervision Activity

What are some special aspects of supervising volunteers which make the process unique and in some circumstances more difficult?

# Unique Aspects of Supervising Volunteers

- Part-time basis
- Volunteers may need more flexibility
- Volunteers more free to leave if dissatisfied
- Good supervision may be new experience for volunteer
- Confusion about who is the supervisor?”
- Supervision may take more time for affiliation volunteers
- Difficult to confront a volunteer

# Supervision Methods

- Specific appointments at designated times
- Open time for scheduling appointments
- Monthly group or individual meetings
- Supervision by “walking around”
- Other



# HANDOUTS

# Guide to Handouts

- H-1:** Key Concepts of Supervision
- H-2:** Supervising Volunteers – Roles and Responsibilities
- H-3:** Skills of a Good Supervisor
- H-4:** Personal Qualities of Good Supervisor
- H-5:** Unique Aspects of Volunteer Supervision

# Key Concepts of Supervision

**The purpose of supervision is to provide oversight, guidance, and support for volunteers, to enable them to do their jobs more effectively.**

## **Concept 1**

**Supervisors of volunteers must clearly understand the park's expectations of them as supervisors.**

Supervision involves the process of stimulating and overseeing the work of others. It is critical that supervisors of volunteers understand their role in preparing volunteers to do their jobs, in providing ongoing support and resources, in preparing reports, and in evaluating the work done by volunteers.

## **Concept 2**

**People who are competent supervisors of paid staff or volunteers share key skills and personal characteristics.**

Supervision skills include delegating, planning, coaching, listening, evaluating, problem solving, recognizing, team building, and communicating. Personal characteristics include being trustworthy, fair, positive in attitude, empowering, and supportive.

## **Concept 3**

**Although principles of supervision for volunteers and paid staff are very similar, there are some unique aspects of supervising volunteers.**

For example, volunteers usually work part-time. If they don't like their supervisor, they can leave. The socialization needs of volunteers may be greater. It may be harder to confront volunteers about problem situations. Volunteer's priorities may be different, requiring more flexibility.

## **Concept 4**

**Supervision systems and methods can vary depending on the formality, size, and style of the park, type of job, etc.**

Supervisors who work with volunteers should take advantage of opportunities to be flexible and accommodating in order to attract and hold good volunteers.

# Supervising Volunteers

## Roles and Responsibilities

### Preparation / Orientation of Volunteer to Job:

- Provide written job description
- Introduce volunteer to paid staff and other volunteers
- Prepare work area
- Explain supervision and evaluation system
- Explain safety management issues
- Share relevant policies and procedures

### Ongoing Support and Resources:

- Training
- Coaching
- Showing appreciation
- Providing materials/Information

### Reporting Requirements:

- Individuals and overall volunteer hours
- Outcomes of volunteer work
- Reports to supervisor/VIP Program Manager
- Other

### Evaluation:

- Periodic performance review of a volunteer in your program
- Written evaluation of volunteer's work
- Other



# Skills of a Good Supervisor

- Delegating
- Planning
- Coaching
- Listening
- Conflict Resolution
- Recognition
- Training/teaching
- Team Building
- Communications
- Problem Solving
- Evaluating / Reviewing
- Climate Setting
- Sharing Knowledge
- Setting Standards
- Other

# Personal Qualities of a Good Supervisor

- Trustworthy
- Consistent
- Models Good Behavior
- Positive Attitude
- Empowering
- Supportive
- Others:

# Unique Aspects of Volunteer Supervision

The principles and techniques of good supervision apply to working with volunteers and with paid staff in a very similar fashion. There are, however, some special aspects of volunteer supervision which must be noted.

1. Before volunteers begin to work in your park, they should have the supervision and evaluation system explained to them so that it is not a surprise element dropped on them without notice. Paid employees generally assume that there will be supervision and evaluation of their work. Sometimes volunteers do not, and they need to have this explained to them up front. They will generally take this as a sign that the agency is serious about its volunteer program.
2. Another issue is to get initial clarity on who will be the volunteer's supervisor. It is always advisable that the staff person working closely with the volunteer provide the supervision. It is essential to make certain that all parties are apprised as to who is the responsible party for the day-to-day supervision and management of the volunteer.
3. Those who manage and supervise volunteers must be very flexible and accommodating to respond to the special nature of the volunteer. This may often involve handling situations that do not occur with paid staff, such as those that arise because the volunteer position may have a lower priority than other things that are going on in the volunteer's life.
4. Volunteers do take the time of the staff who supervise them. This must be understood and planned for in the park, or staff may become rightfully resistant to volunteers. Volunteers frequently do volunteer work to meet some of their social needs and may, therefore, take additional time from their supervisor to meet this need.
5. Learning a process of productive interaction will be invaluable in dealing with more problematic supervisory situations. Often managers and supervisors find it more difficult to apply conflict management principles to dealing with volunteer staff.